

THE SHONA

HANDBOOK FOR GIRLS

Feel The Fear
And Do It
Anyway!

Be Kind To
Your Mind

You've
Got This!

Everything you need to know about nailing secondary school

In partnership with

CUSTODIAN™

EXPERIENCE BRAND SUCCESS



TURN YOUR
CANTS
INTO
CANS
AND YOUR
DREAMS
INTO
PLANS



Hey there!

Welcome to secondary school!

It's a big change and can seem a little daunting. But don't worry, we've got you covered. This book was created especially for you by The Shona Project and includes information, advice and some practical life hacks to help you not only survive but thrive over the next few years.

This book has four sections



Your Heart



Your Mind



Your Body



Your World

We will talk about making new friends, positive mental health & wellbeing, staying positive, the online world, and ways to take care of yourself.

The Shona Project was created by girls, for girls. Don't forget to follow us on social media @shonadotie or check out our website www.shona.ie for more of what you see here.



Best of luck, you got this!

From all the Shona Team

Special thanks to Custodian for supporting us to deliver this book right into your hands x



**REAL GIRLS
AREN'T PERFECT
PERFECT GIRLS
AREN'T REAL**

Contents

Your Heart6

Your Heart	6
Mind your heart	7
Friends	8
Newsflash!!! Not everyone is going to like you!!.....	10
How to Find Your People	11
Bad Friends.....	12
Bullying.....	13
Family.....	14
What is love	16

Your Mind 17

Your Brain	18
Your Mindset	19
A letter to my younger self by Tara	20
The power of YET	21
What would you do.....	22
Algebra for life!.....	23
Your Mental Health.	24
When your panic attacks have no chill.....	25
Dealing with anxiety quotes.....	26
Breathing techniques.....	27
Discover Yourself Through Journaling ..	28
Worry.....	29
Best way to deal with worry	30
The Anxiety Suite	31
Let's Celebrate Neurodiversity	33

Your Body.....35

Wow, your body is really special.....	36
Nourish to Flourish.....	37
Top 3 Breakfast & Snacks.....	38
Sleep.....	39
What happens if you don't get enough sleep?.....	40
Her Moves	41
Movement	43
High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT).....	44
MSD Ireland HPV Awareness.....	45

Your World.....47

Where do you fit in?	48
Be Yourself Quote	49
Where do I start?.....	50
8 simple ways you can help the earth.....	51
Tozi	52
What to do when the news is overwhelming	54
Shine Festival.....	55
Who is Shona?.....	56
Take the Shona Pledge	57
Need Help?.....	58
Thank Yous.....	59

YOUR HEART





Mind your heart



Your heart is your most treasured possession.

It has never let you down, beating every second of every day, when you're asleep, when you exercise, when you're scared, when you're deliriously happy. It keeps going, never distracted, never unsure. **Every. Single. Second.**

But your heart also holds your emotions; blissful happiness, utter despair, agonising sadness and overwhelming love. There's a lot going on in there.

Always protect your heart. Make smart choices about who you let in. You will get hurt from time to time, it's a part of life, but an open heart brings amazing friendships, beautiful relationships and powerful life experiences.

*There is nothing in the world
more powerful than love,
be kind to your heart x*



Show Me

Your Friends

and

I'll Show

You

Your Future

This is so important. The people you choose to spend your time with will have a huge effect on the person you will become. Good friends make you better, bad friends drag you down.

The world of social media makes us think that we should have as many friends or followers as possible...

THIS IS WRONG

One good friend is worth way more than 100 bad ones (or even 50 mediocre ones). And they're very easy to spot because they

- Make you feel good
- Listen to you when you need to talk
- Support you in pursuing your dreams, even if they don't share them
- Challenge you when they know you can do better
- Never judge you
- Never try to bring you down, or compete with you
- Share in your joy, but also feel your pain



NEWSFLASH!!!

NOT EVERYONE IS GOING TO LIKE YOU!!

(But that's okay).

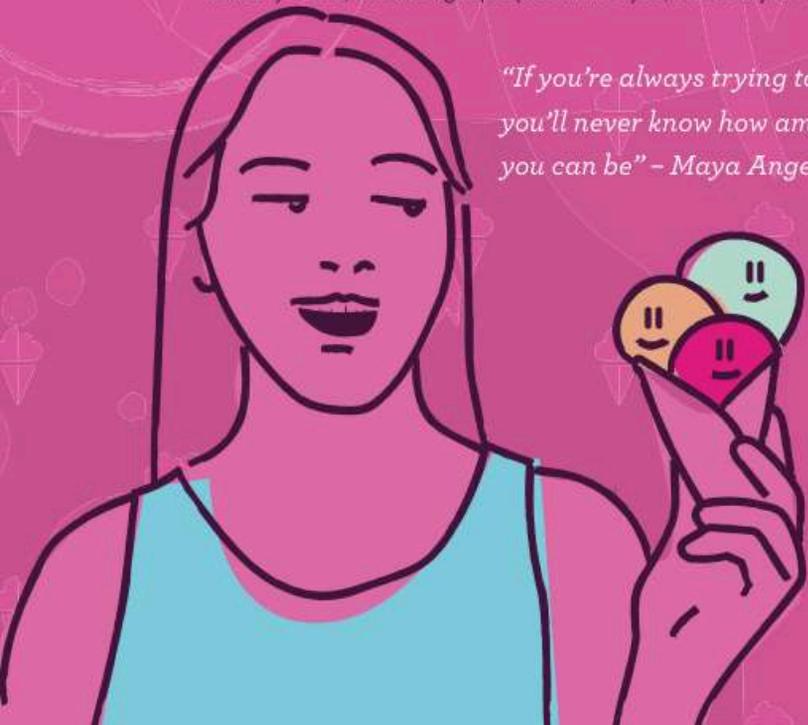
People are just like ice-cream flavours. Some of us like chocolate, some like strawberry, some like mint, some like cookies and cream.

There's nothing wrong with any of those flavours, it's just a matter of taste, and people are the same. We are often attracted to people who are like us, and sometimes we clash.

And that's fine.

Whatever you do, don't water down who you are to be vanilla. Sure, everyone likes vanilla... But vanilla is kinda boring. Always be 100% your own self, whatever flavour you are, and the right people will find you, and love you x

*"If you're always trying to be normal,
you'll never know how amazing
you can be" - Maya Angelou*



How to Find Your People

So... New school, new life, new friends. How do you find your people and make your tribe?

Here are our top friendship tips...

- 1 Be a friend to yourself first:** Be happy in your own company. Know who you are, what your values are and what standards you set for yourself. Don't let people into your inner circle who don't appreciate you for who you are.
- 2 Smile:** A smile is a powerful thing. It immediately puts people at ease. Smile at everyone you make eye contact with. You'd be surprised how quickly their walls come down.
- 3 Give compliments:** Compliments are great conversation starters. Try "I Like your trainers", "Your plog was really funny yesterday", or "Nice goal in PE!".
- 4 Use open questions:** Small talk is hard, but asking questions that require more than a yes or a no answer is a great skill to have. For example

DID YOU HAVE
A NICE
SUMMER?

VS

WHAT DID YOU
GET UP TO OVER
THE SUMMER?

- 5 Try new things:** Join a club, team, or a class, either inside or outside school. Find a hobby that helps you to meet new people, have new experiences, and expand your skills or talents.
- 6 Trust your gut.** Your gut will always guide you in the right direction, when it starts sending alarm signals, listen up.
- 7 Be yourself, always.** Don't try too hard to fit in with the popular crowd. Sometimes fitting in means changing everything that makes you interesting, unique, and colourful. Own it, and people who get you will flock like flies to absorb your energy.
- 8 Have patience.** Sometimes these things take time.

TRUST
YOUR GUT





Bad Friends

People, for the most part, are not good or bad, but they might be good or bad for you. Personalities, especially strong personalities, sometimes clash and you will come across people who just don't get you, who are always competing with you, or who make you feel like you're not good enough.

If people want to be friends, they will both put in the effort and treat each other with respect. It has to be a two-way thing. Sometimes, friends we have had for many years stop being friends. People grow and change and it's important to know when it's time to let go.

Forcing friendships will never work, and often ends in tears. Acknowledging that a friendship won't work, or has run its course is very sad, but it doesn't mean that one of the friends is necessarily to blame. It's okay to wish someone the best, and genuinely want good things for them, but to start spending more time with other people.



Bullying

Unfortunately, bullying exists in every school, in every country all over the world.

First up, know that general disagreements, or one-off rows do not constitute bullying. Bullying is more than that, it is intentional, and happens more than once. It's also all about power; and often happens because the bully feels powerless in other areas of their life, and acts out of frustration.

Remember:

HURT PEOPLE, HURT PEOPLE

Think about it, happy people don't make others feel small. It's important to know that you are never powerless. You can control your own reaction. Walking away without responding or leaving online messages or comments on seen takes a lot of bravery. But try it, and you'll find that, usually, they move on very quickly. (Go to our website www.shona.ie and search "Brooks Gibbs" for a really helpful video on how to handle this.)

If that doesn't work, speak up, tell someone. **Bullying is NEVER okay.**

Q BROOKS GIBBS

▶ YouTube





Family

Families are like snowflakes, no two are exactly alike. We are all part of a web of different people, cultures, faiths, life experiences and personalities. While some do a really good job of appearing to have it all, there is not a single family on earth that is perfect.

Some of us grow up with 2 parents, some with 3, or 4, or 1, and some of us have none. Some of our families go through major changes, through grief, or separation, or trauma.

Somewhere around secondary school, we realise that our parents are not the perfect heroes we might have thought them to be. They are just humans in this world, trying their best, just like we are. And sometimes they make mistakes.

When going through hard times, please remember that it is not your job to fix the problems of the adults in your life. If you feel unsure, confused, or alone, speak to someone who is a little removed from the situation, who you trust, maybe a GP, a teacher or a coach.

Remember that you are NOT alone.



“I have a Mom and two Dads, my stepdad has been in my life since I was a baby. Both families are very different and very separate. It's not always easy, but I know they all love me”

Shaunagh

“When I was 12 my Dad went to live with another woman and her family. I struggled with it for a long time and went to therapy for anxiety for a while. Now I'm doing really well, I have great friends around me and happily live with my Mum next door to my Grandparents”

Emma

“My Mam and Dad separated years ago but still live in the same house because buying a 2nd house is too expensive. They're friends now so it's not too bad. It's just weird having parents who don't share a room”.

Ella

“My parents had me when they were teenagers, but my Mum realised in her 20's that she preferred same sex relationships. It was always just normal for me”

Melissa

“My Mom passed away when I was 6. I live with my Dad and my older brothers. I miss my Mom every day, but my Dad is the best ever, even though he never managed to do a decent plait!”

Mary





WHAT IS LOVE??

Love means different things to different people.

You can love your friends, your family, your pet cat.

You can fall head over heels in love with someone, sometimes they love you back, sometimes they don't.

All these relationships take work from both sides to work. And there is no instruction manual. You will make mistakes, you will be hurt, and you will cause hurt, you will love, and you will learn.

The important thing is to give your heart to those who earn it, and earn theirs in return.

We are all in this together x



MIND

anxiety



depression

breathing

worry



DID YOU KNOW
THAT YOUR BRAIN PROCESSES
SOMEWHERE BETWEEN
60,000–80,000
THOUGHTS
PER DAY.

THAT'S AN AVERAGE OF
2,500–3,300
THOUGHTS
PER HOUR.

Wow!

Those thoughts are made up of a mixture of positive; (learning, problem solving, taking snapshots of beautiful sights and amazing memories, reminding you to drink water and go to sleep) and negative (telling yourself you're not good enough, worrying, stressing, and those down days).

In this section, we will talk about ways in which you can help your brain and your mind to be its absolute best.



Your Mindset.

Your mindset is basically your outlook on life, your approach to challenges, your attitude.

Having a positive mindset is something that you can learn and there are many ways to do this. A really important part of this is thinking about how you talk to yourself. Negative self-talk really harms how you view yourself, and the world around you. Sometimes things are just sad or bad, and it's okay to feel down from time to time. In general though, positivity is a habit. Here's how to train your mind to see the best of life.

- 1 Try starting a gratitude journal, every day, list 3 things you're grateful for, the pepperoni pizza you had for dinner, the fluffy socks you wore to bed, the fact that your parents drove you to school so you didn't have to walk in the rain. Try not to ever list the same things twice. This trains your brain to seek out the positive things and not the negative.
- 2 Turn the bad times into lessons. Instead of focusing on where you went wrong, think about what you have learned and what you will do differently the next time.
- 3 Talk to yourself the way you would talk to others. Why are we so much nicer to our friends and family than we are to ourselves? We forgive each other's mistakes and imperfections all the time. Show yourself the same kindness, you deserve it!
- 4 Surround yourself with positive people. Those who see the good in life are the best people to hang out with! And they will lift you up and support you through it all.



A letter to my younger self by Tara

Dear Tara,

If I am being honest, writing you this letter has been quite difficult for me. It's hard for me to think back on the things that I know you are going through. In some ways, I wish I could travel back and tell you everything you need to know to get through this time a little easier, but in other ways with the help of hindsight, I know that these things end up shaping you into ... well, me.

The first thing you must know (that you really haven't learned yet) is that you are much stronger than you could have ever imagined. I know it sounds like the wrong type of advice, but I need you to stop hoping for a time when you will be "better". You keep envisioning a time when you will be happy, and all of your anxiety and depression will disappear completely. I don't want you to be disheartened when I tell you that those things are still with you ten years later, I want you to understand that happiness can co-exist with these parts of you.

You will learn that these things are just experiences, not personality traits. There are so many weird and wonderful things that make up the person who you are, so you don't need to define yourself by these experiences. Happiness will flow seamlessly into your life. It will pop up in the most unexpected places. It actually exists where you are right now too, it's just a little harder to spot with everything else you are feeling.

I am delighted to report that your closest friends are still with you, and I am excited for you to meet all the amazing new ones too. Hold on tight to those who see the REAL you, they become invaluable as the years pass by.

I'll finish up with this. I need you to know how incredibly proud I am of you. You deserve so much unconditional love and support, and I am happy to say that through years of working through our difficulties, I am here to be that for you now. I'm thinking of you always. You have been with me every step of the way, and I can only hope that I make you half as proud as you make me. Talk to you in another ten years when 36-year-old Tara can sit us both down with all of her wisdom.

Love always,

Tara x

P.S. ever think about the possibility of dating girls? No? Cool.

I'll check back in a couple of years.

The Power of YET

If there's one word you should add to your vocabulary, it's 'yet'.

'Yet' turns "give up" sentences into goals. See for yourself. Instead of

"I DON'T
KNOW HOW
TO SPEAK
FRENCH"

"I CAN'T DO
FISHTAIL
PLAITS"

VS

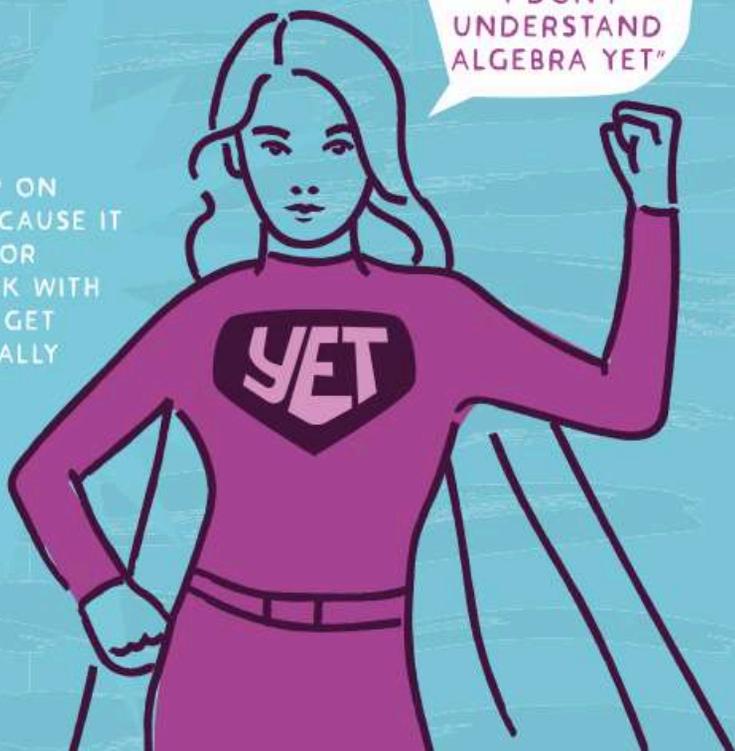
"I DON'T
KNOW HOW
TO SPEAK
FRENCH YET"

"I CAN'T DO
FISHTAIL
PLAITS YET"

"I DON'T
UNDERSTAND
ALGEBRA"

"I DON'T
UNDERSTAND
ALGEBRA YET"

NEVER GIVE UP ON
SOMETHING BECAUSE IT
SEEMS TRICKY OR
DIFFICULT. STICK WITH
IT AND YOU'LL GET
THERE EVENTUALLY



What would you do
if you weren't
afraid!



Algebra for life!

You'll be learning a whole lot of theorems and equations over the next few years. But we have found one that you use every single day!



E= The event is the thing that happens, the class exam you weren't prepared for, the torn muscle just before the cup final, the 'friend' who started a rumour about you. We can't control those things, and we can't change them either

R= The good news is, you can control your response to the event. How you handle it is in your hands, so think it through and make the best of it. Ask yourself, how can I turn things around?

For example, if you don't make the school basketball team, here are your options

- 1 Pick yourself up and start again, invest another year, working harder and smarter, and eventually getting to where you want to be
- 2 Consider other sports or hobbies and see where that takes you.
- 3 Ask the coach what you need to work on specifically, and practice.
- 4 Give up, blame yourself, tell yourself that you don't deserve it.

Whichever path you choose will take you down a different road in life, resulting in a different.....

O= for outcome.

So, there you have it, when life gets real with you, get real about life, the outcome is up to you!

Your Mental Health.

We hear a lot about it, but mental health affects us all from time to time, so it's important that we talk about it, understand what it means, and know how we can take care of it.

Mental health problems can appear in many different forms, including depression, anxiety, panic attacks, eating disorders, self-harm and anger issues.

The dark days can come for any number of reasons, sometimes they can be associated with trauma, or stress, lack of sleep or proper food, loneliness, sometimes they come for no reason at all that we can find. Sometimes you can deal with them just by sharing your feelings with someone you trust and making small changes to your life. Sometimes it takes a little more, such as a visit to your GP, a period of medication, or counselling.

Remember, the first step is always to speak up. You are not alone.

Suggestion: Why not try keeping a mood diary. Record how you feel during the day or week and try to see if they coincide with days when you didn't get enough sleep, or when you feel under pressure at school etc?

ANGER ISSUES

SELF-HARM

PANIC ATTACKS

ANXIETY

EATING DISORDERS

DEPRESSION

WANT NEED
FAMILY UNLOVED
BULLIED
FAILURE
UGLY EXAMS
SAD LONELY



When your panic attacks have no chill....

Science describes anxiety as a physical and emotional response to danger or threat. **It's basically your body's reaction to stress.**

Those of us who experience it, will describe it quite differently, like

"RANGING FROM A SLIGHT TREMOR TO A FULL-ON HURRICANE THAT HITS MY BODY AND MY MIND AT THE SAME TIME." ALANNAH

"I KNOW I CAN'T FIGHT IT, AND THAT MAKES ME EVEN MORE PANICKED"
GRACE

"SOMETIMES IT'S LIKE WHISPERS OF DOUBT AND SOMETIMES IT'S LIKE SOMEONE SCREAMING. IT FEELS LIKE YOU HAVE BEEN BETRAYED BY YOUR OWN BODY AND MIND" CIARA

"I'VE DEFINITELY MISSED OUT ON SOME EXPERIENCES BECAUSE OF IT, BUT I'VE MANAGED TO GET TREATMENT AND I'M BETTER ABLE TO COPE NOW" NAOISE

NO CHILL

"IT'S THE NASTY LITTLE 'WHAT IF' VOICE THAT CRACKS A HOLE IN YOUR CHEST.. THAT'S WHEN THE PANIC STARTS, AND THE WRONG CONCLUSIONS START SWIRLING" ALANA



We asked our readers to share tips and tricks they use to deal with anxiety, here's what they said...

“To me the only way that I can fight anxiety is to talk to someone I trust and get it all out of my head. Anything conflict related makes it worse so nip it in the bud **IN PERSON**, never over text.” **C.**

“Keep yourself busy, which leaves less time for your mind to wander. Exercise is great for this. Lastly, be organised, as leaving certain things to the last minute will make you stress even more.” **A.**

“If you feel a panic attack coming on get out of whatever surroundings you're in and go somewhere safe” **N.**

“Your thoughts will be going 90 miles an hour but try listening to the person who is trying to help you breathe” **A.**

“Knowing that you'll be okay is a comfort, so keep telling yourself that.” **M.**

“The main thing is to breathe. Breathe in, hold for 4 then exhale for 5.” **N.**

“Cry it all out, holding it in will make it worse” **E.**

“Having someone you know, with a calming voice helps millions, if they panic, you panic.” **D.**

How to take it down a notch.... 7-11 breathing.

There are lots of really effective techniques out there for reducing your anxiety. Mindfulness and meditation are great, and there are lots of guided sessions on Youtube that are free and easy to follow. Breathing techniques are not just 'mind tricks', they actually lower your anxiety by working with your body. We love them because they can be done anywhere at any time, and they work.

One technique that we like is the 7-11 technique which is a very simple and powerful tool to help us relax and regain control of our breathing.

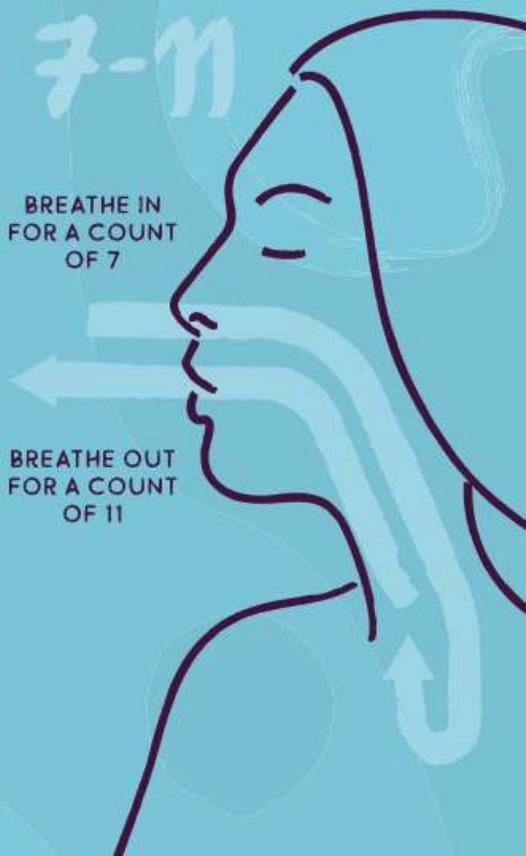
The idea is simply that when your out breath is longer than your in breath, which prompts your body and your mind to slow down, pretty much instantly. When your head starts to spin, take yourself somewhere calm and quiet, even go to the bathroom if necessary, and practice this for about 5-10 minutes.

HERE IS HOW YOU DO IT, AND IT IS AS EASY AS IT SOUNDS:

Make sure that you breathe in through your nose using your diaphragm, which means that your belly, and your lungs are filled with air, as opposed to just holding air in your mouth.

If you find that it's difficult to lengthen your breaths to a count of 11 or 7, then reduce the count to breathing in for 3 and out to 5, or whatever suits you best, as long as the out-breath is longer than the in-breath.

Remember, everyone is different, and this technique won't work for us all, but it is a good place to start. Don't be discouraged, keep talking to those you trust, keep trying new tools, and remember that you're not alone x



Discover Yourself Through Journaling

Have you ever tried journaling? It's a powerful tool to help you understand yourself better and grow in ways you never imagined. Whether you're reflecting on your goals, exploring your emotions, or envisioning your future, journaling is like having a heart-to-heart with yourself.

How do I start journaling?

- **Choose Your Journal:** Find a notebook or app that you love.
- **Set Aside Time:** Dedicate a few minutes each day or week.
- **Use Prompts:** Start with 1 of these, and then see where your words take you.
 - **Prompt 1:** What does your perfect day look like? What activities would you do? Who would you spend time with? What would you eat?
 - **Prompt 2:** What are you good at? What do your friends and family say you're good at? How do these strengths make you feel?
 - **Prompt 3:** What are your short-term and long-term goals? How do you plan to achieve them? Why are these goals important to you?
 - **Prompt 4:** What values are most important to you? Why do these values matter, and how do they influence your decisions and actions?
 - **Prompt 5:** Picture yourself 10 years from now. Where are you living? What are you doing? Who are you with? What does a typical day look like for you?
 - **Prompt 6:** What activities, subjects, or hobbies make you feel excited and fulfilled? How can you incorporate more of these passions into your daily life?

- **Prompt 7:** Choose an emotion you've felt strongly recently and write about what triggered it. How did you react, and what did you learn from this experience?
- **Prompt 8:** What do you hope to achieve, learn, or experience this year? How can you make the most of this time to grow as a person?

Why is journaling a good idea?

- **Self-Discovery:** Understand your feelings, thoughts, and desires.
- **Stress Relief:** Release your worries and declutter your mind.
- **Goal Setting:** Clarify what you want and how to achieve it.
- **Creativity Boost:** Unlock new ideas and perspectives.
- **Emotional Health:** Process and heal from past experiences.

Give it a try, see how journaling can transform your life, and let us know how it goes!

HAPPY WRITING!



WORRY

Ah worry, the root of so much stress.

Do you worry about pretty much everything? You're not alone.

Things we might worry about include:

CLIMATE CHANGE AND
THE ENVIRONMENT...

GETTING ORGANISED
FOR SCHOOL...

STUFF THAT IS GOING
ON AT HOME....

MEETING NEW
PEOPLE....

TAKING ON
TOO MUCH...

WHAT PEOPLE
THINK OF US...

OUR FUTURES....

UPSETTING OR
OFFENDING PEOPLE BY
SAYING THE WRONG
THING...

FRIENDSHIPS AND
FITTING IN....

HOW WE
LOOK.....

ROMANCE AND
RELATIONSHIPS....

SCHOOL AND
EXAM STRESS....

When you think about it, much of what you worry about is out of your control or may never even happen!

For loads of conversations on anxiety and mental health.

Check Out...

www.shinefestival.ie



The best way to deal with worry is to figure out which worries are helping you and which are not.

Let's start with the worries that are about something that can possibly happen in the future....

For example...

What if.... I make a mistake in the camogie match and everyone blames me?

What if.... I work really hard but go blank in the exam and fail?

What if.... I say the wrong thing at the party, and everyone thinks I'm a weirdo?

Let's challenge these thoughts, what is your brain telling you?

What is the likelihood of you making a mistake in that match, and if you do what is the likelihood that everyone will blame you?

In reality, you may well make a mistake, but so might everyone else! And they will probably be so focused on their own game that they won't even think of blaming you.

You may well forget some of what you learned for that exam, but you probably won't. If you know that you studied and stay calm, you will do yourself proud. And if you do fail the exam, it's only one exam! You can do better the next time!

Of course, you probably won't say something silly at the party, you're just being yourself. And you will be surrounded by people who know you and won't give it a thought if you do. Because they might be too busy stressing about what they just said!

If worry and overthinking is a regular event for you, remind yourself that you've been here before, and 9 times out of 10, things have worked out just fine.

The Anxiety Suite

We get it! That's why we want to have open and honest conversations with people who have experienced this in their own lives.

86% of girls in Ireland report that they sometimes feel low, anxious or stressed or that their mental health is not good.*

This is why we have created our Anxiety Suite with Molly Erin Hayes and Tara Rafter.

In episode 1, we meet Molly and Tara and talk about their own experiences with anxiety. We learn about the difference between stress and anxiety when to seek help, how anxiety manifests itself in our bodies and how we can learn to live with anxiety, rather than fighting it.

This is a beautifully authentic conversation and we hope you feel as though this is a safe space so you can know that you are never alone.

*This statistic is based on findings from The Shona Project's Perfect Storm 2025 research

How are you feeling?



The Anxiety Suite explores all the ways that we can practice #SelfCare, understand our minds, and speak up for what we need.

Topics Include:

- 1 Anxiety 101 - understanding what anxiety is.
- 2 Social media & anxiety - "Why can't I stop scrolling?"
- 3 Social anxiety - "Does everyone really hate me?"
- 4 Panic attacks explained.
- 5 Building your anxiety toolkit - "I've Got This."
- 6 Mindset tips - "Does gratitude really work?"

You can find out more information at www.shinefestival.ie or you can scan the QR code!



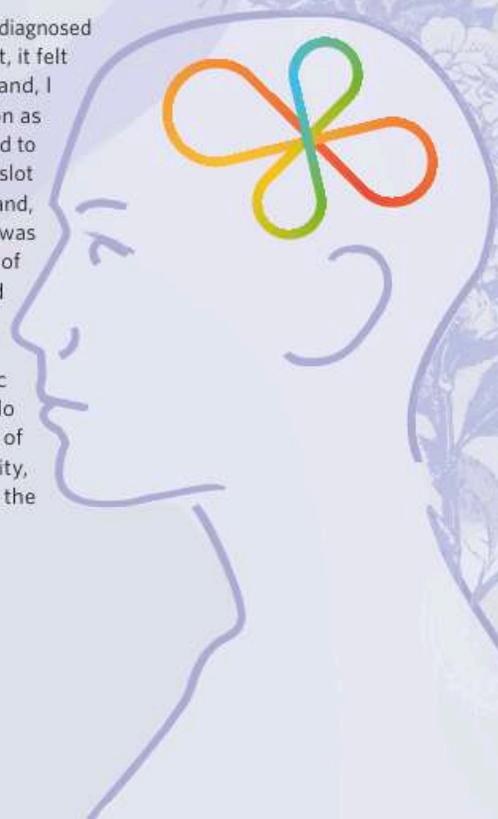
Can you write down 3 specific things that happened today that you are grateful for? It can be the tiniest of things, but try to be as specific as possible!

Neurodiversity

One of the beautiful things about the world is that it is made up of such different people, all individuals who think, learn and communicate in different ways. And there is no single “right” way. Neurodiversity is a word which describes some of these differences, including autism, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, and ADHD, as well as many others.

ONE OF OUR AMBASSADORS, RACHEL, HAS SHARED HER EXPERIENCE WITH US...

My name is Rachel, and I am autistic. I was diagnosed at fourteen and to be completely honest, it felt like the end of the world. On the one hand, I was happy to finally have an explanation as to why I struggled in social situations and to why I always felt as though I didn't quite slot into the world around me. On the other hand, I saw my diagnosis as an ugly mark that was going to follow me around for the rest of my life, infecting everything that I would touch. I struggled to cope with the fact that no matter what I did, I could never undo this diagnosis. I would be autistic forever and there was nothing I could do about it. But I now know that that way of thinking is completely skewed. In reality, being diagnosed with autism was only the beginning of my life.



I was diagnosed considerably late. My mother, Sue-Ellen, had always thought that there was something up. When she spoke to my teachers and principal in primary school they didn't believe her. She kept asking for an assessment for years, and when nobody believed her she did a childcare course to try and find more information. It wasn't until I started in secondary school that I got the support I needed, and was officially diagnosed in second year.

I had always felt that there was something different about me, but I could never pinpoint what it was. In social situations, I always felt as though I wasn't really there. It was like I was watching everyone talk and laugh from a big glass cage. I could see everything that was happening, but there was an invisible barrier preventing me from interacting with the world around me. While social situations can be challenging, I now have amazing friends and a wonderful boyfriend who loves and accepts me for who I am. I've also started seeing a therapist who has really helped me over the past year.

Autism has shaped me in many ways. While of course there are bad days, autism has also given me many strengths. I feel everything so very deeply. I am invested in my interests with all my heart and soul. I love to read and to study history and poetry. But the thing that I am the most passionate about is the Irish language. Autism allows me to feel things on a deeper level than most people, and indulging in the things I am passionate about allows me to recharge after a long day.

I thoroughly believe that autism is a thing that should be celebrated, not hidden away. This is why I share my experience with you all. Autism is unique to everyone who has it, and no two autistic people are the same. Autism is something that should be embraced completely. Every neurodivergent person should embrace and celebrate their strengths, and deserves to feel comfortable in their own skin and who they are.

My message to any autistic person, diagnosed or not, is that you deserve to take up space. If you can embrace that part of yourself it can become one of your biggest strengths. I know how difficult some days can be, but there is support out there for you if you need it. You aren't alone in this, and everything will turn out okay.

If you need help or support, please check out our friends at AsIAm.



YOUR

BODY



positive

healthy



Wow, your body is really special.

Think about it, your body is the most amazing tool that carries your heart and soul through the world, allowing you to do so many things!

Every little cell from the tips of your eyelashes to that freckle on your middle toe works in unison to get you through each day, and most of it operates without you even telling it to!

Your body changes so much over the first few teenage years, it's hard to keep up! Before you know it, you're a woman, and women are the strongest, most powerful creatures of all.

TV, magazines, social media and advertising have been conning women for years into feeling insecure about our bodies. They tried to tell us that our value is based on our appearance but we're not accepting that anymore! We need to recognise, reject and resist harmful messages about our bodies, and what "beauty" means, and looks like.

Our bodies are not ornaments to be admired, they are the tools that allow us to make our mark on this world, to sing, to dance, to run, to smile, to stretch, and most importantly to smile and to hug.

Be kind to your body. Thank it for doing its best by taking care of it.....

The 4 best ways to do that are:

- Nourish it with healthy food
- Hydrate by drinking plenty of water
- Get enough sleep
- Move!



Nourish to flourish

Food is fuel so you can do all the cool things in life you want AND it's there to be enjoyed.

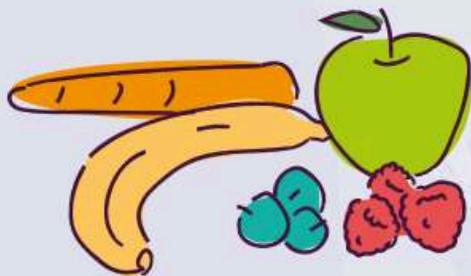
As a teenager your body needs more energy and nutrition at this stage of life than it will ever need (except for pregnancy and lactation). As your body grows into adulthood there are many changes that occur and many emotional, mental and physical challenges that can be made a little easier through eating the right types of food. Nourishing your body will allow you to flourish into a strong healthy woman.

There are so many mixed messages in the media about which food and/or diet is the best to follow but what is most important is focusing on foods that make you feel good on the inside and out. Food contains powerful nutrients and energy to allow your body to do all the things you need to do, like study and clean your room, and those that you enjoy whether that is playing a match, dancing all night, baking a cake or laughing uncontrollably.

Focusing on eating foods like; fruit, vegetables, chicken, meat, fish, dairy, eggs, nuts, seeds, lentils, wholegrain bread, pasta and rice will enhance your energy and wellbeing, allowing you to do all of these things with a little more ease. Food can also enhance your concentration and emotional wellbeing, as well as boosting your immune system, which will give you great skin, nails and hair to boot.

Confectionery type foods can also play an important role in our emotional health, I certainly feel better occasionally after enjoying a Chocolate bar! However, it is probably best to try to limit chocolate, sweets, cakes, biscuits and fizzy drinks as they can make us feel tired, lethargic and they can play havoc with our skin.

Another useful tool to help you eat the right type and amount of food is the concept of mindful eating. Mindful eating is eating without the distraction of T.V., your phone or even the company of others. This technique allows you to fully focus on eating your chosen food so you can appreciate its taste, texture, how nutritious it is and how it is nourishing your body. Once you start to think more about your food as you eat it and how it is enhancing or diminishing your energy, skin and/or concentration levels, the more likely you are to choose more nutritious food more often.





To make your eating a little easier and ensure you are getting the right nutrients to flourish, check out our favourite 5-minute meals below.

BREAKFAST

YOGHURT & BERRIES



- Energy
- Reduced hunger
- Strong bones

RICE CAKES & NUT BUTTER



- Energy
- Brain power
- Glowing skin

SNACKS

RICE CAKES & AVOCADO

- Energy
- Brain power
- Glowing skin



FRUIT SALAD

- Energy
- Immune boosting
- Healthy skin

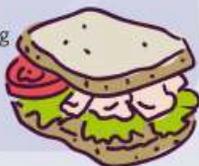


LUNCH

WHOLEGRAIN SANDWICH

Green leaves, tomatoes, chicken and mayo

- Energy
- Immune boosting
- Satiety



VEGGIE WRAP

Wholegrain wrap, red & yellow peppers, cucumber, spinach, hummus, feta cheese

- Energy
- Strong hair & nails
- Brain boosting





SLEEP!

Hands up who loves their bed???

It's the best place on earth!

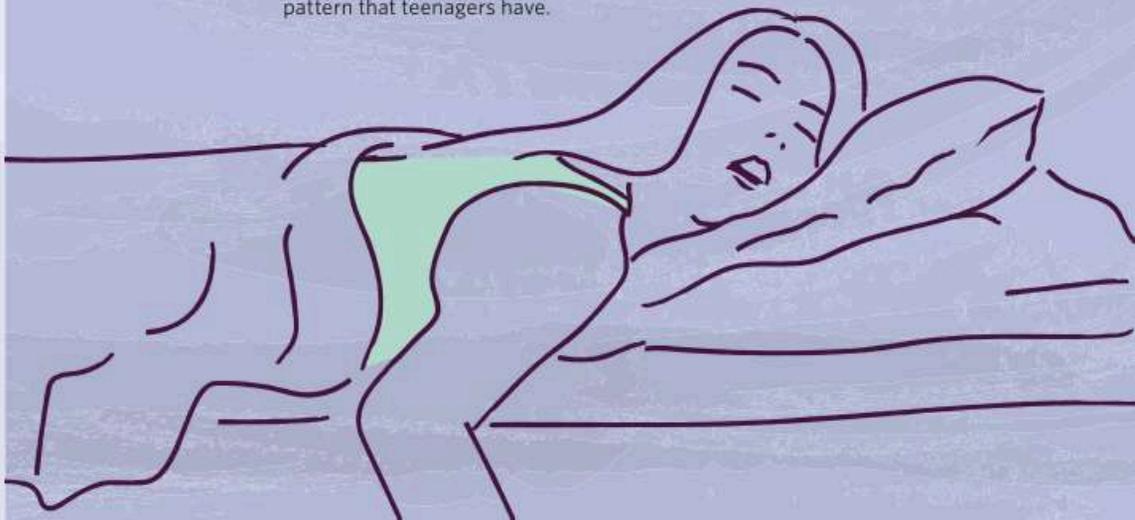
Funnily though, we all seem to avoid getting into bed, but once we get in there, we do everything we can to avoid getting out!

We asked our friend, Doctor Sharon O'Donnell, why sleep is so important...

“During sleep our bodies reboot- our brain processes all the information we have gathered during the day (including schoolwork!) and our body gets busy repairing muscles, healing wounds, making hormones and growing.”

Sleep is a really important time for the body and allows it to rest and concentrate on all these other jobs rather than doing all the things it normally does during the day. Teen years are particularly important times of change and most teens need 9-10 hours per night. Unfortunately, due to changes in our body clocks, teens often feel tired later in the evening, but still have to get up really early for school, and then end up tired all day!

This leads to the typical up late and sleeping half the day at weekends pattern that teenagers have.





What happens if you don't get enough sleep?

WHAT IF I HAVE TROUBLE SLEEPING??

Get a good bedtime routine

Try to go to bed at roughly the same time every night

Don't use screens before bed- phone or computer games, laptop or TV all stimulate the wrong bit of your brain before sleep and lead to being alert rather than rested.

Have a cup of hot chocolate or milky drink before bed- it actually helps- avoid caffeine in coffee or tea

Try to have the bedroom not too bright or warm.

If you're worrying about things and have a lot on your mind- keep a notebook beside your bed and write down the issues before you fall asleep.

IT'S HARDER TO DO ANYTHING

YOU CRAVE SUGARY FOODS MORE

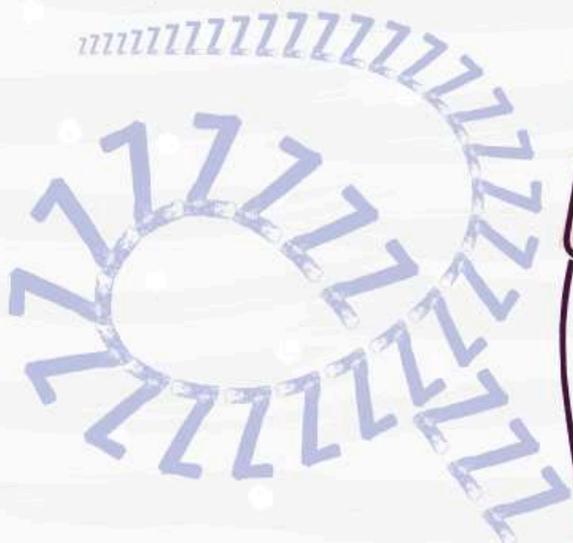
POOR CONCENTRATION

EYES ARE OULL

SNAPPY AND IRRITABLE WITH PEOPLE

SKIN IS GREYER

LOW MOOD





Her Moves is here to support you, and your friends!

Explore what moves you, and turn it into your new favourite way to shine.

***Mastering the Menstrual Cycle
in Sport with Her Moves***

Managing the menstrual cycle can feel like a minefield on an average day, never mind the days where you require more from your mind and body e.g. PE class, exam days, after school sport or club training!

We teamed up with teen girls to create our Her Moves Period Positive Posters, which are helping coaches, teachers and parents to be more educated, understanding and supportive.

Start by tracking your menstrual cycle, learning your symptoms and cycle length, so you can work with your body. Learn how to stay active with Her Moves

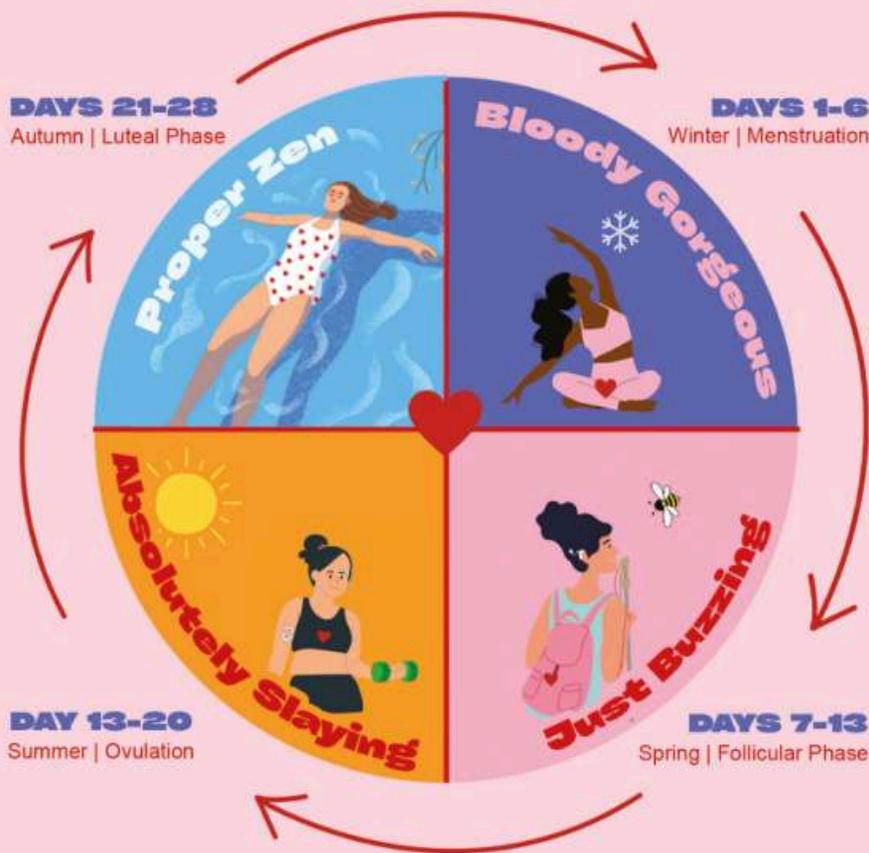
***Join us @
hermoves.ie***



An initiative of

GO WITH THE FLOW

Get to know how your period affects you & find out what movement suits you best during each 'season'.



Tracking your period can help. Scan here for advice.



SPÓRT ÉIREANN
SPORT IRELAND

HM
A GLUaiseachtai
HERMOVES

Movement

Exercise is brilliant. It's good for everyone, and there are so many ways to do it, so there's at least one option for us all. Choosing to move however and whenever you can is one of the best ways to stay healthy.

Some of us like to push ourselves by competing against others in teams, running marathons or jumping out of aeroplanes.

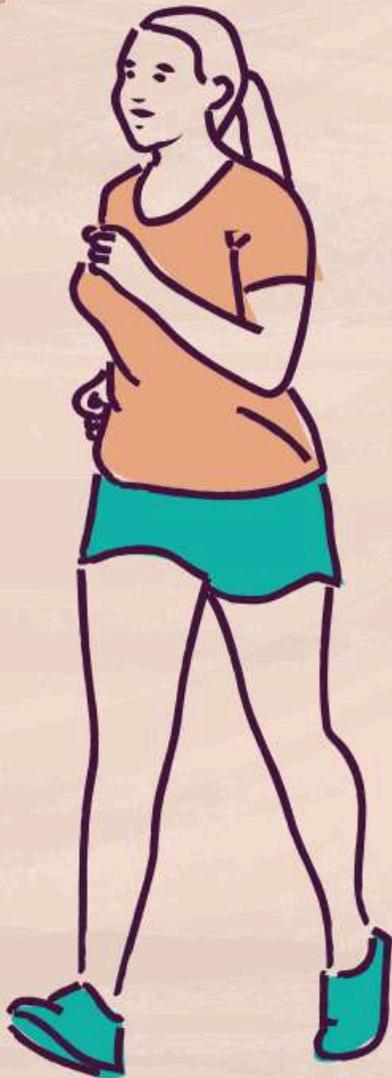
Some of us like to express ourselves more artistically by dancing, drumming or doing yoga.

Some of us are allergic when it comes to exercise because we don't like PE, or getting mucky, or being outside.

The key is to find a way to raise your heart rate that works for you.

It will make you feel good! Here's the science...

- 1 Exercise helps to distract you from worries by focusing on your own performance.
- 2 Exercise is a great way to meet other people and feel part of a community.
- 3 Exercise releases happy chemicals in your brain such as serotonin and endorphins. All of the good stuff!
- 4 Being fitter helps you sleep better.





The good thing is, exercise does not mean you have to go to the gym for two hours or go running every evening. Simply trying to get 10,000 steps per day, and being physically active, combined with good nutrition, is plenty to stay on top of your fitness levels and promote body confidence. If you enjoy exercising, below is a simple High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) session that you can do at home or in the gym, if this is not for you, just get out for a walk in the fresh air whenever possible.

HOW TO:

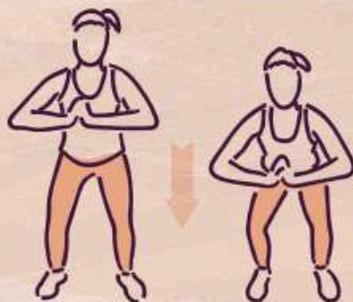
Complete circuit 1 as many times as possible in 10 minutes. Take a 2 minute break and the repeat one more 10 minute block.

*Please consult your doctor if you have any pre-existing conditions before carrying out any of the exercises

Circuit 1...start those stopwatches.....GO!

20 REPS AB BIKES

With hands behind ears & legs in table top, twist your torso towards one knee, extending the opposite leg. Repeat to other side to complete 1 rep.

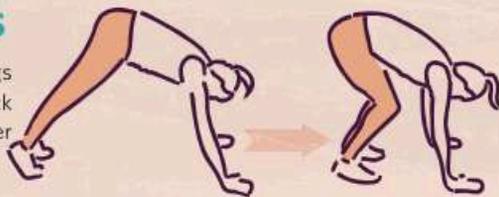


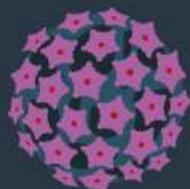
20 REPS JUMPS

Squat to the floor, touching the floor with your hands and jump up with your hands above your head. This is 1 rep.

20 REPS BURPEES

Squat to the floor, jump legs out to a plank, jump legs back in, & stand back up, reach over head. This is 1 rep.





Are you **HPV** aware?

HPV stands for **Human Papillomavirus**. It's a name for a very common group of viruses. Nearly everyone will get some type of HPV at some point in their lives.¹

There are over 200 different types of HPV. Some are totally harmless and go away on their own. But some types can cause things like **genital warts** or even certain **cancers, including cervical cancer**.¹

Reference

1. HSE. What cervical screening is - <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/cervical-screening/why-go/what-cervical-screening-is/> (Accessed June 2025).



Red Oak North, South County Business Park,
Leopardstown, Dublin D18 X5K7 Ireland

This information was developed and funded by MSD. It is intended to provide general educational information for members of the Republic of Ireland only and does not take the place of professional medical advice.

Date of preparation: June 2025 IE-GSL-00219

5 Facts about HPV Aware

1

HPV is really common

Like, really common. **Nearly everyone** will get some type of HPV at some point in their lives. It's nothing to be ashamed of – most people don't even know they have it.¹

2

It's passed on through close contact

HPV is spread mostly through **intimate skin-to-skin contact**. That usually means during sexual activity.¹



3

Most people with HPV don't feel sick

There are often **no signs or symptoms**. So someone can have it and not even know.¹

4

Most of the time, your body gets rid of it

For most people infections go away all by themselves within **1 to 2 years**.¹ Your immune system is pretty amazing like that.

5

But sometimes, HPV sticks around

And that's when it can cause **genital warts** or even certain **cancers**, like **cervical cancer**.¹

In Ireland, there's a National Immunisation Programme where **boys and girls in 1st year** are offered the **vaccination against HPV** in school.¹

Wanna learn more?

Check out **HPVAware.ie**
for more info.

(This is an MSD developed
disease awareness website)



Reference

1. HSE. What cervical screening is - <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/cervical-screening/why-go/what-cervical-screening-is/> (Accessed June 2025).

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MSD

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YOUR

WORLD





Where do you fit in?

The world is a big and beautiful place full of all types of people, families, tribes and communities.

While it's important to look inside ourselves and figure out who we are, it's also important to look outside ourselves and to be aware of the world around us, and how we can use our skills, talents and interests to contribute to that world in a positive way.

The world needs people who think differently, who can help to solve the problems that we are currently facing. There are so many ways in which you can use the parts of yourself that are considered "different" in a positive and powerful way.

What characteristics do you have that make you feel powerful? Circle the words below that you consider yourself to have as a strength, and draw a line under those you want to develop...

responsibility integrity authenticity fairness generosity
dependability confidence positivity individuality
loyalty optimism perseverance independence kindness
good friend courage
honesty respectfulness self-discipline creativity

"Why fit in when you were born to stand out?"



Be
YOURSELF

so the people
looking for you
can find you

text



Where do I start?



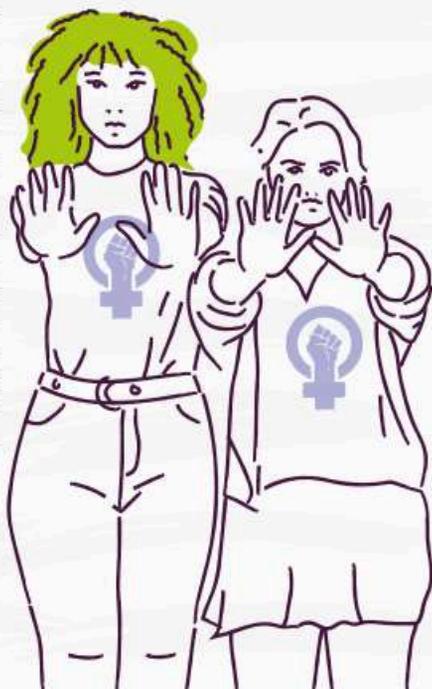
In recent years there has been a huge uprising by the young people of Ireland. Gone are the days when young people should be seen and not heard. Irish teens really care about the world that they will inherit and want to get involved.

What do you care about? Climate change, equality, politics, human rights, homelessness, feminism, education?? Pick a cause, and get stuck in. Here's how you can start...

1 Ask questions. There's more to education than what you learn in school. Learn as much as you can about the world around you by asking questions. Our favourite question is "Why"; Why do people behave as they do? Why do we do things this way? Why do we make assumptions about those who are different to us? Why do we still use so much plastic?

2 Understand. There's nothing more satisfying than chatting to someone who agrees with us on everything. But this is what causes division among us. Have a rational and grown up chat with people who see the world differently to you. Try to understand their points of view and challenge your own.

3 Take Action. Start somewhere. The world's problems seem too big for any one person to solve. But if everyone makes a little contribution, it can be transformative. You can start small, by getting involved in a litter pick, volunteering at an animal shelter, making different choices about sustainable fashion or writing letters to the people who make decisions that affect you.





8 simple ways you can help the earth

- 1 Stay informed:** Sign up to newsletters from organisations like Greenpeace, watch documentaries or hit up Youtube. (Note: Watch out for fake news!)
- 2 Reduce, reuse, recycle.** Set your family the challenge of reducing your plastic use by 20-30%. There are so many ways to do this, even down to your menstrual products
- 3 Start a compost heap** (or a compost bin). Throw all your organic waste in a pile at the bottom of the garden and let nature do its thing.
- 4 Think about the clothes you buy.** Research ethical and eco-friendly brands. Embrace the fake by looking for fake leather and suede where possible.
- 5 Hit up your charity shop.** Trust us, there is nothing more rewarding than finding treasures in your local charity shop. And it helps your bank account too!
- 6 Avoid the dryer.** Tumble dryers use so much energy, and they shrink your favourite jumpers. Get a clothes horse.
- 7 Grow your own veg,** it's amazing how much of your veg is flown or shipped from the other side of the world. What a waste of energy! Get yourself a window box and stick some tomatoes, garlic, lettuce or carrots in there.
- 8 Check your products,** learn as much as you can about the chemicals that are being put into your deodorants, cosmetics or hair dyes.
- 9 Try to avoid one-wear outfits.** What a waste of money. Why not organise a massive clothes swap party for all your friends, so you can make sure each loved item of clothing gets to live a full and happy life.



The logo for Tozi is a stylized, multi-colored shape (red, orange, yellow) with the word "tozi" in white lowercase letters.

tozi

*Tozi is your space
to feel good online*

Available to download on



Scan the QR code
to download Tozi at
www.to-zi.com



Discover Tozi

The free mobile app, packed with tips to boost your digital wellness, Tozi helps you understand your feelings and thoughts better. Whether it's for you or a friend, start your journey to self-discovery with Tozi today!

What will you find in Tozi?

Cosmos

Explore our Cosmos of content with Tips, Quiz's, Polls, Podcasts and Articles on online wellbeing.

My Space

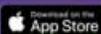
Create your My Space account and chill out by tracking your thoughts and feelings.

Childline

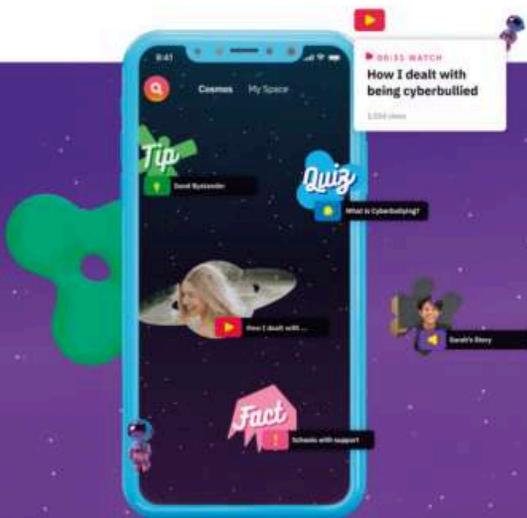
For Tozi users needing support or someone to talk to, Childline services are here to help.

Download Tozi

Tozi empowers and supports young people in their online journey by creating a kinder, safer, and more positive digital world.



Our Partners





What to do when the news is overwhelming

It feels that the news has been overwhelming and scary for a long time now. We should be used to this right now right? No. No, we shouldn't.

TikTok and Instagram can bombard us with videos of awful content, especially those involving war and death, and there is a level of uncertainty that can be very hard to deal with, especially if you're someone who struggles with your own mental health. So we hope this can help you to take care of yourself when the news feels overwhelming.

How to Take Care of Yourself

One of the best ways to take care of yourself is to stay informed, but know your limits. There is a difference between understanding the situation, and just bombarding ourselves with upsetting content. There is very little that we, as young people in Ireland can do to help at this point. We can have compassion and empathy, and still care for ourselves.

Focus on Your Education and Growth

If you want to change the world, focus on your education and personal growth. When you leave school, you can use your voice and power to speak out against injustice or become a hero who helps those displaced or traumatized by war.

Tips to Manage Your Mental Health

If the current news is impacting your ability to focus on these goals, here are some tips to help you take a step back and refocus:

- **Maintain a Routine:** Decide what time you go to bed and wake up, and pay attention to what you eat and drink.
- **Engage in Hobbies:** Spend your free time on activities you enjoy and that make you feel good.
- **Monitor Your Online Activity:** Choose carefully what you read or post about, and limit your time online.
- **Direct Your Energy Wisely:** Focus on what you can control and make small, positive changes in your daily life.

Stay Informed, but Choose Wisely

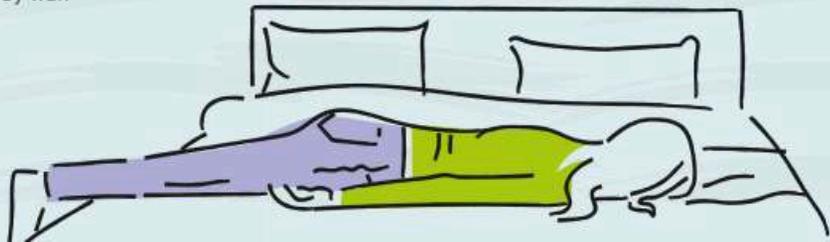
Understand that the media often focuses on upsetting content to get clicks. If you want to stay informed, find reputable news sources that provide short but clear updates. Podcasts can be a good option, as they avoid graphic images that can stick with you longer and cloud the facts.

Balance the Negative with the Positive.

Remember, there are many amazing people and organizations doing important, life-saving work. Try to balance the negative news with stories of positivity and hope. Let those doing good inspire and empower you for the future.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

Taking care of your mental health is crucial, especially in times of uncertainty. Stay informed, but know your limits. Focus on your personal growth and find a balance between staying aware and staying positive.





SHONA PRESENTS

SHINE

FESTIVAL

Have you heard of **Shine** Festival??

Every year, The Shona Project brings together thousands of girls in October to celebrate International Day of the Girl. We hear from amazing women on every aspect of our lives including:

- **Mental health**
- **Career**
- **Sports**
- **Social Issues**
- **Women's Health**
- **The Arts**
- **Mindset**
- **Confidence**
- **AND MUCH MORE...**

We have recorded hundreds of conversations with inspiring women who speak honestly about the challenges they've faced, the obstacles they have overcome and the lessons they have learned.

Find out more and watch these important conversations at

WWW.SHINEFESTIVAL.IE



Scan to learn more



Who is Shona?

Shona is Tammy Darcy's - The Shona Project Founder - sister. Tammy has always mentioned that "no matter how hard I tried to catch up as a child, Shona always remained a solid 18 months older than me. In spite of this, we bonded over a shared love of rice pudding, fancy pages and erasers that smelt like strawberries".



Shona is such an important part of The Shona Project and not a day goes by where she isn't in each of our minds. So, we asked Tammy to tell us all about her, so you too can have a special place in your heart for Shona.

*"Personality-wise we were total opposites, Shona was a soft and gentle soul, happy to go along with whatever everyone else was doing and stare dreamily at the clouds on the way. I, on the other hand, had a steely determination to succeed at everything, even at that stage. I always competed with myself, as Shona had no time for my bull s**t, and felt I was a little dramatic for her taste.*

Shona had a bright future in front of her. She was beautiful, smart, gentle and loving. Somebody would have been very lucky to have her as a wife someday, and she would have made an amazing mother to some very lucky children if she had been given the chance."

Sadly, this wasn't to be. Between the ages of 13 and 15 Shona started struggling to do normal everyday things and was eventually diagnosed with AVM Arteriovenous Malformations (a type of acquired brain injury). Her health began deteriorating very quickly and my parents were told that she would probably pass away within about a year. Shona had remarkable strength and defied logic, medicine and science, to live for another 30 years. For most of those years she lived in full-time nursing care. Sadly, she passed away on February 1st 2023, surrounded by her family. She was incredibly loved.

"I have lost the sister I thought I would share my life with. We will never laugh, cry and dance together, share late-night phone calls, Friday night cocktails or girly shopping weekends. By naming this organisation "The Shona Project" I feel like she is, in spite of her illness, creating an impact on the world, and people will know who she was. The Shona Project is her legacy, and we will continue to do this important work in her name."

Founder, The Shona Project

Tammy Darcy



TAKE THE SHONA PLEDGE

Join the thousands of girls across Ireland who have already taken our pledge, a promise to be good to yourself, and to others...

I have a beautiful soul, a brilliant mind, and an open heart.

I acknowledge that I am an ever-growing and always-learning work in progress.

I own my flaws, but I will succeed in spite of, and maybe because of, my weaknesses. They do not define me.

I promise to lift up other girls, to have their backs, to appreciate and celebrate our differences and to encourage them to always be themselves.

I will always be myself.

I promise to be kind, not just to others, but also to myself.

I will use my voice in a positive way and be a positive influence in this world.

I am enough.

Signed:

**DON'T FORGET TO TAKE THE PLEDGE ON
WWW.SHONA.IE AND SHARE IT WITH YOUR
FRIENDS USING THE HASHTAG **#SHONAPLEDGE****



Need help?

We really encourage you to ask for help if you need it. The first step is usually to make an appointment with your GP, who can advise you based on your individual needs. The hardest thing is to admit you need some help and reach out to someone. But do it, you'll be glad you did.

There are also some amazing organisations out there offering support and information. Some of these are mentioned below.

Remember, the most amazing, compassionate, successful and inspiring people we know are those who faced challenges and managed to overcome them.

Hang in there, it will pass x

- SPUN OUT:** This is a one stop shop for all mental health issues. The articles are very matter of fact, helpful and all bases are covered.
- TACKLE BULLYING:** Lots of resources for kids, parents and teachers on dealing with bullying.
- SAMARITANS:** This helpline is open **24 hours a day** and completely confidential. Call 116 123.
- BODYWHYS:** Online, phone and group support for eating disorders.
- CHILDLINE:** Helpline and online support, offering advice and support to young **people under 18.**
- BELONGTO:** Support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals in Ireland.
- AWARE:** Providing support and assistance to that section of society whose lives are affected by depression, bipolar disorder, postnatal depression or suicidal thoughts.
- MY OPTIONS HSE:** Advice and support for those experiencing crisis pregnancies.
- TURN2ME:** Support for anyone feeling **anxious, sad or lonely.**
- YOURMENTALHEALTH:** Lots of information about Mental Health in Ireland.
- B4UDECIDE:** Information and resources on all things sex education.
- TOOINTOYOU:** **A Women's Aid project** teaching and supporting young people, particularly young women, about intimate relationship abuse.



Big thank you to the Shona Family

This book was put together by a huge team of amazing people, including teachers, parents, experts, doctors, mental health professionals, students, and girls of all ages. Every single one of them knows how it feels to be a teenager, and wishes they had a book just like this one back in the day.



Special mention to all the team at Shona, who volunteer their time to make sure that every girl in Ireland has access to information, advice and a safe place to share their stories.



Thanks to everyone at Vitamin for doing a sterling job designing and illustrating this work of art. Check them out: vitamin.ie

----- **vitamin** -----

Thank you to Custodian for being such complete sounders and sponsoring the print, design and delivery for 2025.

----- **CUSTODIAN** -----
EXPERIENCE BRAND SUCCESS

Thank you to every single person who contributed, we owe you guys cake!



*This book is for Shona, and for each and
every one of you. X*

CHECK OUT
— OUR —
WEBSITE

« WWW.SHONA.IE »

//// OR ////

~ FOLLOW US ~
ON SOCIALS



— FOR MORE —

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The Shona Project is a registered charity and is governed by a board of experts and professionals.

Contact education@shona.ie for more information.